



GAMES NEWS

DEAD AGAIN

Ash, the star of the *Evil Dead* films, is back with his chainsaw. *Evil Dead Regeneration* features the likeness and voice of cult favourite Bruce Campbell. The game is a 'what if...' continuation of the film *Evil Dead 2*, and invites you to kick, punch and shoot your way through hordes of evil dead types.

Ash, part-time S-Mart manager and full-time fox, said: "There is only one person in the world fit for this kind of work – and that's me. Not just because of my knack for getting things right, but because I can slice and dice evil better than a knife sold on any late-night infomercial. Maybe it's because I've replaced one of my hands with a chainsaw." We'll bring you a review soon.



YOU'LL BE MYST

Myst V is the latest game in the classic 10-year-old series and, like the original, throws the player in at the deep end without instructions. A demo, available at www.ubisoft.com, has no official description or Readme file. The game is due for release as we go to press, but look out for a full review next issue.

REVIEW GAMES SERVICE

METABOLI Games On Demand

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Essential Collection £6.95 inc VAT per month; Ultimate Collection £13 inc VAT per month

DETAILS www.metaboli.co.uk



Metaboli lets you play your game as it downloads

Building a large games collection can be expensive, so why not let somebody else do it for you? Metaboli's Games On Demand service lets you access its full collection for a monthly charge. All you need is a broadband internet connection.

Selecting a game activates the Metaboli player, which downloads games and launches those already stored on your PC.

If you've played *Half-Life 2*, you might expect another painful Steam-like experience. Fortunately, games download quickly and you can start playing them before the download has finished.

Before you play a game, an application checks your PC's specification and compares it with the game's requirements. This will quickly tell you whether your PC is powerful enough for the game.

Games are downloaded in an encrypted format and are unencrypted only when you log on to Metaboli's servers. There's no offline mode, so you can't play without an internet connection. However, if you've already downloaded the game you can log in over a GPRS connection on a notebook, for example, and carry on playing.

The service lets you play your games from any internet-connected PC. If you don't want to download the game again from scratch, you can copy the encrypted files to another PC, log in to your account and start playing.



The downloaded games are fully functional, and Metaboli even patches them and sends out updates. Saved games are stored as they would be if you had bought the game, so you can back them up or transfer them to another computer.

Metaboli offers two services: the Essential Collection, which had 36 games as we went to press, and the Ultimate Collection, which offered 53 games. The Ultimate Collection adds

between three and five games per month, and contains newer titles, such as *Act of War*. The Essential Collection acquires between three and five games from the Ultimate Collection each month, so it's fine for those who are less interested in keeping up with release schedules.

Both services are excellent value and provide access to more games than you could afford. If you don't like a game, discard it and download another. This should be high on any broadband gamer's list.

David Ludlow

✓ Access to lots of games; fast downloads

✗ Can't play downloaded games offline

REQUIREMENTS Broadband internet connection; otherwise, requirements as for chosen game

HOTLIST ACTION GAME

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.mx2.co.uk

DETAILS www.rockstargames.com



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is simply an amazing game, featuring three lush cities, hundreds of varied missions and the chance to do whatever you like. The graphics are lush and look great on a PC's monitor. However, you'll need a joystick to get the most out of it.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 3.6GB disk space. Product code GTASA/PCORING/E



HOTLIST SIM AND BATTLE GAME

Stronghold 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

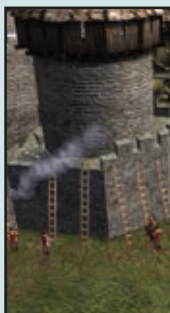
SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.stronghold2.com



The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, *Stronghold 2* takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time around you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.4GHz Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space. Product code B0007GIXOW



HOTLIST ONLINE SHOOTER

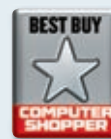
Battlefield 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

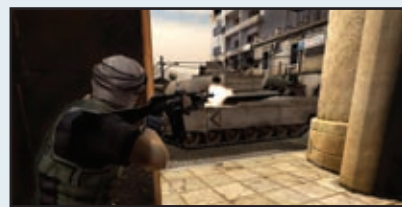
SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.com

DETAILS www.eagames.com



Battlefield 2 updates the original and lets you play with up to 64 online players. Teamwork is the name of the game, and you must use a variety of weapons and vehicles to help achieve your team's objectives. Brilliant fun and stunning to look at, this is one of the best online games available.

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 2.4GB disk space. Product code B0006VSLEU





REVIEW STEALTH ACTION GAME

ENLIGHT Aurora Watching

RATING ★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.simplygames.comDETAILS www.enlight.com

This game certainly doesn't skimp on clichés. You play the part of a drunken former secret agent who is summoned back to active duty to help locate a brilliant but evil scientist. Sadly, while many games can overcome such turgid plot lines, this one doesn't have much to offer. Although it tries desperately to keep up with third-person stealth games such as Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell, Aurora Watching is left far behind.

Your character can run, walk and creep silently, but often it doesn't make any difference. Sometimes you can burst noisily into a room and open fire at the man using the computer without getting so much as a flutter out of the guards in the next room. At other times you could be sneaking quietly through a blizzard only to be shot from miles away by an eagle-eyed guard. You can shoot back, but aiming is often difficult, and you can waste a clip of ammo before finally dispatching your target. It doesn't help that when you run out of ammo, the game picks the most ludicrous replacement weapon. Often our machine gun would run out of ammo and, instead of offering us the pistol, the game would volunteer the sniper rifle; not particularly useful for close combat against three armed guards.

Once you've killed your opponents, you can search the bodies for useful items and drag them out of sight so as not to alarm other guards walking past. This sounds good in theory, but it's poorly executed. The bodies frequently get caught on furniture and are impossible to move, and when you do manage to drag them there's often nowhere to hide them.

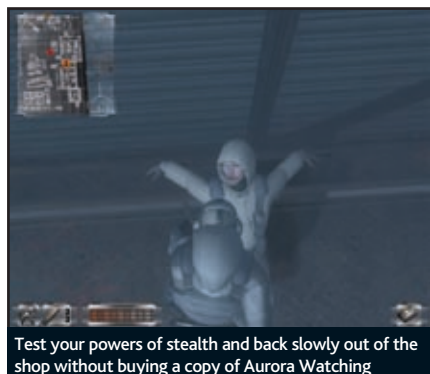
If you persevere, this game is playable and the graphics are satisfying. If it's real stealth action you're after, though, try Splinter Cell instead.

David Ludlow

✓ Impressive graphics

✗ Poor controls; stealth parts often don't work well

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, 700MB hard disk space. **Product code** ENL000



Test your powers of stealth and back slowly out of the shop without buying a copy of Aurora Watching

REVIEW MANAGEMENT GAME

DIGITAL JESTERS Pro Cycling Manager

RATING ★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.cycling-manager.com

There are few programs that stun the *Shopper* office into silence. Pro Cycling Manager is one of them, but for all the wrong reasons. This game takes the fast-paced, exciting world of professional cycling and puts you in charge of the dulllest aspect of it: management.

It might have helped if the game had been lovingly crafted and was a joy to use, but it wasn't. The main game menu uses large icons with no text, so it's hard to know what you're selecting. Many of the game's options are just as obscure, so you must either plough through the manual or take a wild guess to proceed.

The game offers a choice of challenges including time trials, single races and – if you're a glutton for punishment – entire racing seasons. In each race, it's your job to select the bike's components to get the best performance from your riders. But it's hardly worth the effort.

Once the race starts, you're treated to a poor 3D rendition. The unrealistic cyclists mock the accepted laws of physics, not so much cornering as turning 90 degrees. The backdrops are just as poor. The spectators are static and look as if they're made of plastic. Towns are one-house deep, and in one village we passed through, everyone had an identical square blue car. This B-movie scenario made us wonder if there had been an alien invasion or if, like us, the static spectators were turning into zombies.

A separate application provides the option to play online – that is, if you can find anyone else who has enjoyed playing the game and is prepared to pit their Pro Cycling Manager knowledge against yours.

Sadly, the dull subject matter and poor implementation make this one to avoid.

Simon Handby

✓ All the thrills of top-flight cycling management

✗ Unintuitive interface; terrible 3D environments; unrealistic cycling

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space, 32MB graphics. **Product code** ASIN B000919VBW



Static spectators line a street in the world's skinniest town to watch cyclists defy the laws of physics

REVIEW PUZZLE SOFTWARE

GREENSTREET Su Doku Master

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Greenstreet 01480 496789

DETAILS www.greenstreetsoftware.info

Unless you've been living in a cave for the past couple of months, you'll have picked up on the Su Doku craze. Every newspaper from *The Sun* to *The Daily Telegraph* is running its own version of these puzzles, and books are springing up all over the place. It's not surprising, then, that games developers have jumped on the bandwagon. Several versions of this puzzle have arrived on the PC, but one of the first on the market is Greenstreet's Su Doku Master.

Whether you have just discovered Su Doku or you're a proficient player who is after a challenge, you should be able to find a puzzle that suits you. The puzzles have been grouped into three levels of difficulty, and there's an against-the-clock option for real experts. Su Doku Master also offers several variations on the traditional theme, in which the numbers are replaced by symbols or tiles. You can even add different backgrounds to further spice up gameplay.

Complete beginners can access hints and tips, although some of the help gets in the way of the game. For example, if you select the 'Indicate illegal moves' option, it's impossible to place a number in the wrong square. This might help you understand how the game works, but it also takes some of the fun out of it.

Advanced players can devise their own games and undo moves to the last correct move; this beats the printed versions, where you can only scribble out mistakes if you go wrong. The program includes an option to print out the puzzles, so you can solve Su Dokus while you're away from your computer. You can also save a puzzle at any point to continue later.

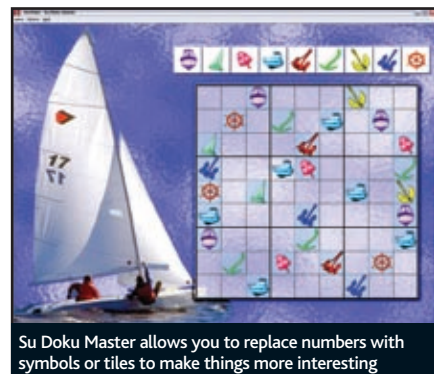
This title offers thousands of puzzles, making it much better value than the books.

Sam Ellis

✓ Cheap; lots of options to keep up interest

✗ Some features take the fun out of the game; design is basic

REQUIREMENTS 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 15MB disk space, Windows 98 or later, 16-bit sound card



Su Doku Master allows you to replace numbers with symbols or tiles to make things more interesting